

Leaf peepers can get virtual preview of New England foliage

If you're headed to northern New England this fall, check out the computerized maps that predict where the colors will be.

Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont all have official Web sites highlighting the popular and lucrative fall foliage season, which draws camera-toting visitors from around the world.

All offer regular foliage reports, promote fall events to keep tourists busy and suggest travel routes. Vermont's and New Hampshire's Web sites have maps that predict the colors on specific days or weeks. Maine has a map of current conditions.

"For instance, you can point to this weekend and see that up north it's just turning to near peak, whereas on the Seacoast, it's mostly green," said Alice DeSouza, New Hampshire's director of travel and tourism. "You can tell instantly."

Foliage season in all three states begins around mid-September and runs into late October, progressing north to south.

New Hampshire's map is based on previous years' reports, but the state can update the map after checking the Web site colors against reports from its official leaf peepers. Visitors

can sign up for alerts via cell-phone text messaging.

Vermont offers a map that changes colors, week by week.

In Maine, Forest Service rangers track the changing colors for the official state foliage reports. Rangers are reporting the best early color along mountaintops and valley watersheds in the state's northernmost towns. Leaf peepers can sign up for weekly updates via e-mail. Go to www.visitnh.gov, www.maine-foliage.com or www.vermontvacation.com.

